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THE INFLUENCE OF ACTIVATION ON RECALL AND PERCEPTION OF A NEGATIVE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Psychology

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by

Cassandre M. Clarke

June 1995

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Approved by:

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Dr. Matt Riggs, Chair, Psychology

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Dr. Joanna Worthley, Psychology

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Dr. Kenneth S. Shultz, Psychology

ABSTRACT

The researcher investigated the influence of the activation dimension of affect on the recall and the perception of fairness of a negative performance appraisal. The experiment consisted of two phases: exposure and testing. During the exposure phase, 100 subjects were presented with either a moderately arousing or highly arousing negative performance appraisal. During the testing phase, subjects were first required to recall as many negative personality describing words and general points as possible. Second, subjects were required to complete a perception of fairness questionnaire. The moderately and highly arousing groups did not significantly differ in terms of perception of fairness or recall of either specific negative personality describing words or general points. Several possible influences may have blocked the intended effect: the study lacked mundane reality; the study closely resembled the real world where the emotional content of words do not produce an effect; the size of the text was too large; or a subject-produced positive emotional node blocked the intended negative perception.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Matt Riggs, whose guidance and expertise was immensely appreciated.

In addition, I wish to thank Dr. Joanna Worthley and Dr. Kenneth S. Shultz for their critical analysis and provided suggestions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The performance appraisal process is an effective tool to initiate a dialogue between supervisors and employees. One of its primary purposes is to give employees feedback concerning their past performance and offer useful suggestions for areas of improvement. An ideal consequence of this process would be the employee accepting the feedback and using it to improve in the areas that were deemed inadequate. However, emotion, an important component tied to the feedback, affects the memory and perception of the feedback and its effects on future behavior. This effect has long been recognized by many feedback researchers. For example, research has focussed on the differences between positive and negative feedback in terms of processing, interpretation, and recall (Feather, 1968; Ilgen & Hamstra, 1972; Shrauger & Rosenberg, 1970). These studies primarily focussed on the evaluation component (pleasant vs unpleasant) of emotion or affect. However, from a review of the performance appraisal research, it appears that the second important dimension of affect, activation or arousal, has been largely ignored. The purpose of this study is to examine whether the activation component may also have an effect on employees' perception and recall of feedback.

Cognitive Processing of Evaluative Feedback

Researchers have found that positive, as opposed to negative feedback, is processed, recalled, and perceived more accurately (Feather, 1968; Ilgen & Hamstra, 1972; Shrauger & Rosenberg, 1970). This process may promote an inflated positive self-perception or a positive illusion concerning one's capabilities if an individual receives negative information and does not process, recall, or perceive it accurately (Taylor & Brown, 1988). The continuous maintenance of a positive illusion generates a capacity for creative, productive work. Positive illusions can facilitate intellectual functioning by increasing the use of efficient, rapid problem solving strategies (Isen, Shalker, Clark, & Karp, 1978) or by promoting unusual and diverse associations that enhance creative problem solving strategies (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). Furthermore, positive illusions may enhance motivation, persistence, and performance through their influence on self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their capability to perform particular tasks in particular situations (Bandura, 1977). This belief results from the cognitive appraisal of informational cues such as enactive mastery (repeated performance achievements), vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. It is likely that an individual who holds an inflated self-perception of him/herself, created by the biased processing

of positive information, will likely hold a higher level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy governs the initiation and persistence of coping skills to meet goals in the face of obstacles. Furthermore, self-efficacy plays a role in an individual's decision regarding the amount of effort to expend to complete particular tasks (Bandura, 1982). If the individual holds a high self-perception of him/herself, he/she will likely have a high level of self-efficacy which in turn, will lead the individual to engage and persist in more task-related activities. On the other hand, if the individual is faced with a negative evaluation, there are certain biases in encoding, interpretation, and retrieval that may occur to protect the positive self-perception. An individual who is confronted with contradictory feedback may simply ignore it (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979) or the individual may accurately encode the negative information but may not be able to retrieve it (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979).

If the individual encodes and retrieves the negative feedback accurately, the attempt to change the negative attribute is not guaranteed. Individuals tend not to change their initial self-perceptions following a negative evaluation. Rather, they attempt to discredit the evaluation itself or discredit the source of the evaluation (Shavit & Shouval, 1980). The cognitive-consistency theoretical formulation proposes that people tend to

perceive and interpret information that maintains a stable self-percept. Alternatively, a self-esteem formulation maintains that people tend to discredit negative feedback in order to avoid changing their self-percept in a negative direction (Shavit & Shouval, 1980). Thus, it is likely that if an individual accurately encodes and retrieves negative feedback, an interpretational bias may still result.

Perceived Fairness of the Evaluative Feedback

One possible interpretational bias is the perception of unfairness of the performance appraisal process. To date, the performance appraisal literature has neglected to examine whether the sign of the feedback influences the recipient's perception of the procedural fairness of the appraisal process. If, in fact, the sign of the feedback influences the perception of fairness, this could have significant implications for the organization.

There appears to be a link between employees' perceptions of procedural justice and intentions to quit (Dailey & Kirk, 1992). The perceptions of unfairness may cause an otherwise satisfied employee to consider leaving the organization. Or, as Dailey and Kirk (1992) hypothesized, employees may be in search of evidence that demonstrates that the performance appraisal system was biased in order to rationalize their desire to quit. The authors stated that, "there may be some externalization of causality when it comes to employees' explanations for their

desire to quit" (p. 314). This could greatly impact an organization whose employees have high job mobility. If there are many job opportunities for these individuals and they experience or perceive procedural inequities, they may be more likely to leave the organization. In addition, perceived procedural justice (fairness) has strong effects on attitudes about institutions or authorities. This may, in turn, affect variables such as organizational commitment and trust in supervisor (Folger & Konovsky, 1989).

From the above, a supervisor appears to be caught in an uncomfortable position. If he/she gives negative feedback, it may be futile. The employees may not encode or retrieve the feedback correctly or the negative feedback may cause a perception of unfairness that could motivate the individual to quit, increase mistrust in the supervisor, or decrease the individual's organizational commitment. Alternatively, providing only positive feedback will not correct the mistakes the individual has made in the past.

Activation Component of Affect

The answer to this dilemma may come from the examination of another dimension of affect. Past research has focused on the differences between positive versus negative feedback in terms of performance appraisal outcomes (Ilgen & Hamstra, 1972; Jaworski & Kohli, 1991; Shrauger & Rosenberg, 1970). Unfortunately, most research has neglected to examine the arousal component of the positive

or negative feedback. According to Osgood (1969), evaluation, potency, and activity (E.P.A.) were the three universal components that defined the emotional meaning of words. Evaluation described the pleasantness or unpleasantness of a word. Potency characterized a dimension of uncontrolled versus controlled. Activity depicted the degree of activation or arousal. Following Osgood's (1969) paper, several researchers began searching for affective factors of meaning. For example, Russell (1978) examined the convergent validity of the dimensions of affect obtained in three studies. Despite differing methodologies, the three studies produced evaluation and activation dimensions; however, they differed in their findings of a third dimension. Russell (1978) compared the proposed dimensions by intercorrelating the dimensions of the three studies. The results of Russell's (1978) study confirmed that evaluation and activation were indeed two dimensions of affect. However, the researcher could not provide evidence for a third emotional dimension of word meanings. Similarly, Sweeney and Whissell (1984) found that evaluation and activation explained about 80% of response variance in rating or scaling tasks of emotional words. The third dimension, whether potency, locus of causation, or any other derived factor, has not yet been found to be powerful or stable enough to be considered a discrete dimension of emotion.

The current emotion and memory research has recognized the differences between levels of activation, differences between levels of evaluation, and the interaction between levels of these two factors in terms of memory (Sweeney & Whissell, 1984; Whissell, Fournier, Pelland, Weir, & Makarec, 1986; Whissell, Povey, & Dewson, 1987). Thus, in order to achieve a complete representation of the effect of the sign of the feedback on memory and perceived fairness, the activation component of affect should be included as a second factor. However, as stated earlier, feedback researchers have included only the evaluation dimension in their studies (Ilgen & Hamstra, 1972; Jaworski & Kohli, 1991; Shrauger & Rosenberg, 1970). In the feedback research, the concentration on the evaluation dimension and the consequent neglect of the activation dimension may have resulted from difficulties in quantifying levels of activation. Perhaps researchers were more comfortable with classifying words into the extremes of pleasant and unpleasant. Intuitively, the task to determine whether a word is pleasant or unpleasant (evaluation) is easier than the task to determine the arousal level (activation) of the word. However, this has become easier since the introduction of the Dictionary of Affect in Language (Sweeney & Whissell, 1984).

The Dictionary of Affect is a word scoring source that provides a list of 4500 English words rated along two

bipolar affective dimensions of activation and evaluation. The Dictionary of Affect in Language is a useful tool for evaluating the affective tone of a passage or a list of words. By scoring each word separately within the list, the experimenter is able to obtain the affective tone for the entire list. Whissell et al. (1986) stated:

> "If a text or list is being scored by the Dictionary of Affect, several scores may be generated including the proportion of scored words to total words, the mean evaluation and activation score, and the frequency of occurrences of words in the highest and lowest quartile for each dimension" (p.877).

In addition to using the Dictionary of Affect to obtain the affective tone of a list or passage, the Dictionary is useful in generating stimulus material. As stated earlier, emotion researchers had difficulties in quantifying emotional words or phrases in terms of their dimensions of evaluation and activation. The development of the Dictionary of Affect added precision to measuring emotional content.

With the development of the Dictionary of Affect, the influence of the activation dimension can be objectively examined. Would there be differences in recall and perception of fairness between highly arousing and moderately arousing negative personal information? It is likely that the individual may be more threatened by the

highly arousing negative performance appraisal and may be unable to accurately perceive or recall the negative points of the appraisal. Alternatively, the moderately arousing negative evaluation may not be perceived as threatening to the individual and the self-protective strategies may not be necessary.

It should be noted that previous research on arousal and its influence on memory is directly opposed to the suggestion that recall of highly arousing negative feedback would be less accurate than recall for moderately arousing negative feedback. In fact, findings suggest that the higher the arousal level of the item, the greater it's recall (Eynsenck, 1976). Contini and Whissell (1992) conducted a study to examine the differences in paired associates recall for words of varying emotional character. The results revealed that associates of neutral words were better recalled than associates of emotional words. Furthermore, the emotional word-cues that were of high activation were better remembered than words of low activation. The authors proposed that their results could be explained by the network model, where it was assumed that the active words were better able to activate the nodes in the network than words that had a low or moderate activation level. In addition, a study conducted by Paul and Whissell (1992) confirmed that emotional words that were high in activation were better remembered than words that were of

low or neutral activation.

Apparently, the arousal level of words affects their recall, with higher arousal words eliciting greater recall; however, it should be noted that the studies conducted thus far have contained words or passages that did not have a significant meaning to the subjects. It is unlikely that subjects would engage in self-protective strategies when required to remember a set of non-personally relevant words. It could be assumed that recall would be inhibited and interpretation of fairness distorted when the emotionally negative and active words were personally relevant to the individual.

Purpose of Study

This study was conducted in order to examine the influence of the activation dimension on the recall and perception of fairness of a negative performance appraisal. The following hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1: Specific personality describing words in a moderately active performance appraisal will be bettered recalled than specific personality describing words in a highly active performance appraisal.

Hypothesis 2. General points in a moderately active performance appraisal will be bettered recalled than general points in a highly active performance appraisal.

Hypothesis 3: A highly active negative performance

appraisal will be perceived as more unfair than a moderately active negative appraisal.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

One hundred subjects were taken from different courses at California State University at San Bernardino and Laurentian University to participate in the study.

Stimuli and Apparatus

The Dictionary of Affect in Language is a word scoring source that provides a list of 4500 English words rated along two bipolar affective dimensions of activation and evaluation. An evaluation and activation score is provided for each word and the scores vary along a 7-point scale with a mean of 4 and a standard deviation of 1. Neutral words are defined as those within 0.2 standard deviations of the dictionary's population mean. Words at least 1.5 standard deviations away from the mean are considered to be at the extreme pole of either the activation or evaluation scale. A rating of 1 on either dimension characterizes words that are highly pleasant or inactive. Alternatively, a rating of 7 represents highly unpleasant or active words (Whissell, Povey, & Dewson, 1987).

Several methods were employed to obtain the words that appeared in the Dictionary of Affect in Language. Pairs of subjects volunteered to select words that were descriptors

of emotion from an English dictionary; the result was a list of 700 words. A selection of words by subjects from Russell's (1980) and Conte and Plutchik's (1981) experiment provided a second source. Finally, the experimenter provided the third source by selecting words from a dictionary of commonly used words (Whissell et al., 1986). The Dictionary of Affect is similar to Heise's (1965) dictionary which listed 1000 words rated along the dimensions of activation, evaluation, and potency. Heise obtained scores for the three dimensions by employing a semantic differential technique whereas the Dictionary of Affect's rated dimensions were obtained by calculating the mean of subject's ratings for each word (Whissell et al., 1986).

A test for reliability of the Dictionary of Affect produced a test-retest reliability of .75 for evaluation and .60 for activation. In addition, the authors performed several tests of concurrent validity. For example, Whissell (1981) had asked subjects to rate words along two dimensions of affect (evaluation and activation). Correlations for the 49 words common to Whissell (1981) and the Dictionary of Affect were .70 for evaluation and .59 for activation (found in Whissell et al., 1986). Another concurrent study compared 28 words found in both Russell's (1980) study and the Dictionary of Affect. Correlations of .89 for evaluation and .72 for activation were produced (Whissell et al., 1986).

The experimenter used the Dictionary of Affect to find 24 words that were similar in evaluation (highly unpleasant) but differing in terms of activation (moderate versus high). Twelve pairs of words were produced, with each pair consisting of two words that are listed as synonyms in the WordPerfect 5.1 thesaurus. One word of the pair contained a high activation rating; alternatively, its counterpart was considered to be moderate in activation (See Table 1). The experimenter had attempted to find words low in activation; however, it was virtually impossible to find synonyms low in activation that matched the moderate and high activation words' evaluation rating. Once the word pairs were developed, two performance appraisals were generated that contained either the high or moderate activation words. The two performance appraisals differed only in terms of the twelve emotional words. The remaining text was identical in content and wording (See Appendix A).

A perceived fairness test was developed by the experimenter in order to measure the extent to which subjects felt that the performance appraisal was fair. The items were selected from a 26 item questionnaire developed by Folger and Konovsky (1989). Only 7 of the 26 items were selected from the list. The other 19 items were only appropriate for a verbal evaluation where it would be possible for the subject to interact with the evaluator or where the subject had the opportunity to observe the process

Table 1

Stimulus Words and Corresponding Activation Level

Activation	
High (level)	Moderate (level)
disappoint (4.80)	dishearten (3.33)
agitate (6.13)	annoy (3.99)
antagonistic (5.32)	unfriendly (4.35)
resentful (5.12)	spiteful (4.51)
oppressed (4.93)	repressed (3.37)
complaining (5.19)	disapproving (4.28)
enemy (5.08)	rival (3.51)
possessive (4.69)	jealous (3.73)
cruel (6.61)	merciless (4.32)
reject (5.05)	scorn (4.06)
irritable (5.11)	grouchy (4.44)
stubborn (4.89)	willful (3.65)

in which the data for the evaluation was collected. Table 2 displays the loadings for each item on the feedback factor. In a factor analysis conducted by Folger and Kononsky (1989), this feedback factor emerged as one of five factors: feedback, planning, recourse, observation, and unnamed.

The seven items were then used to produce seven questions regarding the fairness of the performance appraisal. A 5 point Likert scale developed by the experimenter allowed subjects to mark a rating along a continuum of strongly agree to strongly disagree for each of the seven questions.

Procedure

The experiment consisted of two phases. The first phase involved the presentation of the performance appraisal to the group of subjects. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions. Half of the subjects received a highly active, negative performance appraisal. The other half received a moderately active, negative performance appraisal.

The corresponding performance appraisal was then given to the subjects (see Appendix A). The subjects were verbally instructed as follows: "Read the instructions and the performance appraisal carefully. As soon as you have completed reading the performance appraisal, turn the page, and read the instructions on the back page."

Subjects were instructed to write down on a sheet of paper as much of the text of the performance appraisal as possible, with particular emphasis on the negative

Table 2

Factor Loadings of Procedural Fairness Items on Feedback

Fairness Items	Loading
1. Was honest and ethical in dealing with you	.78
2. Used consistent standards in evaluating your performance	.68
3. Gave you feedback that helped you learn how well you were doing	.64
4. Was completely candid and frank with you	.60
5. Showed a real interest in trying to be fair	.55
6. Made clear what was expected of you	.45
7. Obtained accurate information about your performance	.39

"personality describing" words and behaviors that were used in the appraisal. In scoring the recall of the negative "personality words", the experimenter gave one point for each correctly remembered negative personality word. In addition, subject's memory for the negative work behaviors was scored. The second method of scoring required subjects to remember only the general or subjective meaning of the negative points without having to remember the exact negative "personality describing" words or behaviors. The text was scored by two individual raters. The following are the points that were to be recalled:

1. eagerness to complete projects often annoy (agitate) and dishearten (disappoint) your fellow employees.

2.Your co-workers perceive you being both grouchy (irritable) and merciless (cruel).

3. Relating on a more personal level will change their perception of you as a rival (enemy).

4. Your occasional unfriendly (antagonistic) comments to your co-workers have repressed (oppressed) their efforts.

5. Attempt to be less willful (stubborn).

6. You tend to scorn (reject) other's input.

7. You are spiteful (resentful) and attempt to elicit all the glory.

8. Be less disapproving (complaining).

9. Be less jealous (possessive) of high profile cases.

In sum, there were twelve personality describing words

and nine general points to be recalled.

Once the recall portion of the testing phase was completed, the subjects were asked to complete a perceived fairness questionnaire (See Appendix B).

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Descriptives and Tests of Assumptions

The overall means and standard deviations for memory of SPEC, GEN, and FEED is displayed in Table 3. SPEC was a measure of the total number of specific negative personality words remembered out of a possible twelve. GEN was a measure of the total number of general negative points remembered out of a possible nine. FEED was a measure of the average of the sum of scores on the seven items of the fairness scale.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for SPEC, GEN, and FEED

Variable	Means	Standard Deviations
Spec	1.870	1.212
Gen	2.970	1.267
Feed	2.706	.898

An interrater reliability analysis was conducted on GEN. This analysis revealed a .92 ($p < .001$) correlation between

the first and second rater. Since the correlation between the two raters were high, the scores from the first rater were used for the analyses. It should be noted that the experimenter did not conduct an interrater reliability test on the SPEC variable. In scoring this variable, the experimenter had only accepted the original twelve negative personality describing words as being correctly recalled. There was no judgement involved in scoring because no other form of the stimulus words were scored as correct (e.g. synonyms).

An internal-consistency reliability analysis was conducted on FEED. A summary, provided in Table 4, displays the item total statistics for the seven item fairness scale, labelled F1 - F7. The alpha for the perception of fairness scale was .87. It appears that a deletion of any one of the seven items, with the exception of item F4, would have decreased the internal consistency of the scale. With regard to item F4, the increase in alpha gained by deleting this item from the scale would have been minimal (.0018). Since the change in alpha would have been so slight and since it was the first time the scale had been used, the researcher kept the item in the scale.

The data was examined for normality. Looking at the distribution of cases displayed in Figure 1, it appears that SPEC was positively skewed (skewness = .741) with a concentration of cases at 1 (36) and 2 (26). Only 8

Table 4

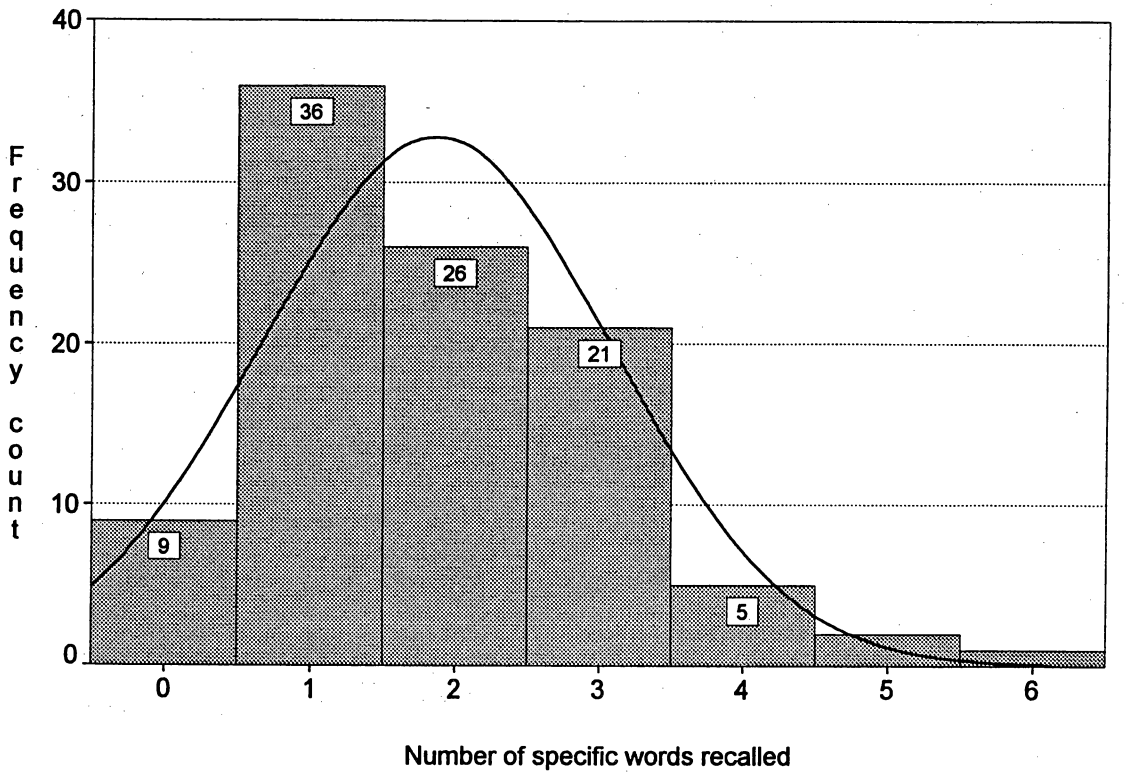
Item-total Statistics for Perception of Fairness Scale

	SCALE MEAN IF ITEM DELETED	SCALE VARIANCE IF ITEM DELETED	CORRECTED ITEM-TOTAL CORRELATION	SQUARED MULTIPLE CORRELATION	ALPHA IF ITEM DELETED
F1	16.140	28.8893	.6807	.5270	.8525
F2	15.950	29.4217	.6678	.5048	.8543
F3	16.420	28.7511	.7214	.5446	.8470
F4	17.110	33.5938	.4801	.3019	.8760
F5	15.750	29.4419	.6841	.5293	.8522
F6	16.500	28.9192	.6021	.4600	.8649
F7	15.770	28.3405	.7480	.5687	.8433

ALPHA = .8742

Figure 1

Frequency of Specific Words Recalled



subjects remembered four or more words. The last two variables (GEN and FEED), as displayed in Figure 2 and Figure 3, approximated normality (skewness = .209 and .340, respectively).

A logarithmic data transformation was applied to SPEC in an attempt to achieve normality. SPEC normalized after the transformation (skewness = -.419) as displayed in Figure 4 (named LSPEC).

Homogeneity of variance was then examined for the SPEC, GEN, and FEED variables. For all three variables, the variances for the moderate and high activation groups were not significantly different (Bartlett's Box F = .689, p = .406; Bartlett's Box F = 1.890, p = .169; Bartlett's Box F = .002, p = .961, respectively).

Inferential Statistics

A t-test was conducted on LSPEC by activation level (moderate and high). A summary, provided in Table 5, displays the means and standard deviations of LSPEC by activation (moderate and high). There was not a significant difference found the moderate and high activation group in terms of the specific number of words remembered [t(df = 98) = -.01, p = .995, eta = .00].

A t-test was conducted for GEN by activation level (moderate and high). A summary, provided in Table 5, displays the means and standard deviations of GEN by activation (moderate and high). There was not a significant

Figure 2

Frequency of General Points Recalled

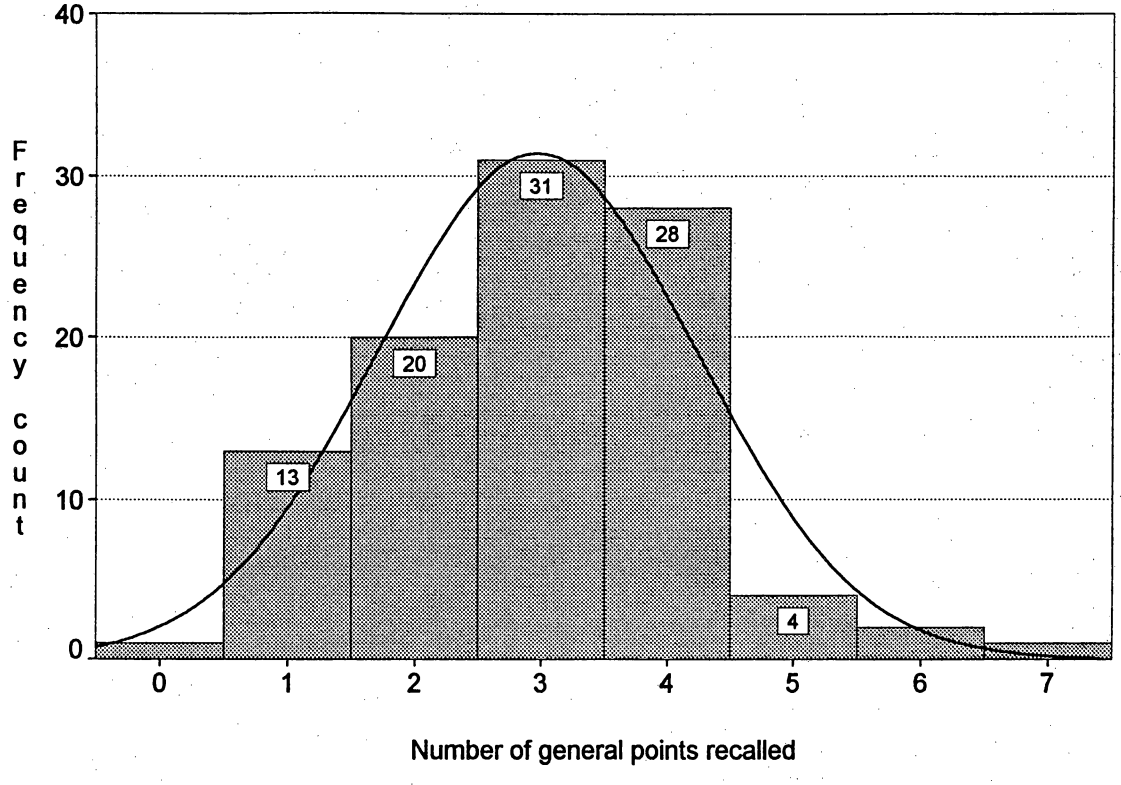


Figure 3

Frequency of Mean Ratings of Fairness

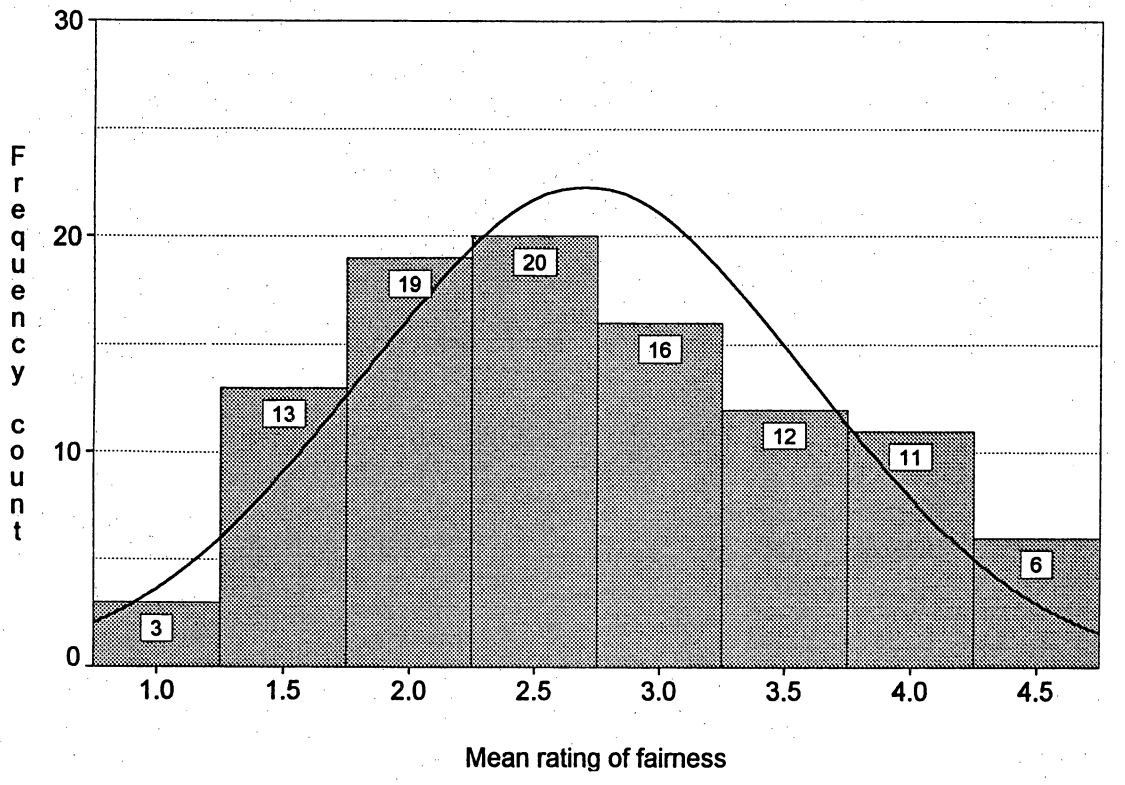


Figure 4

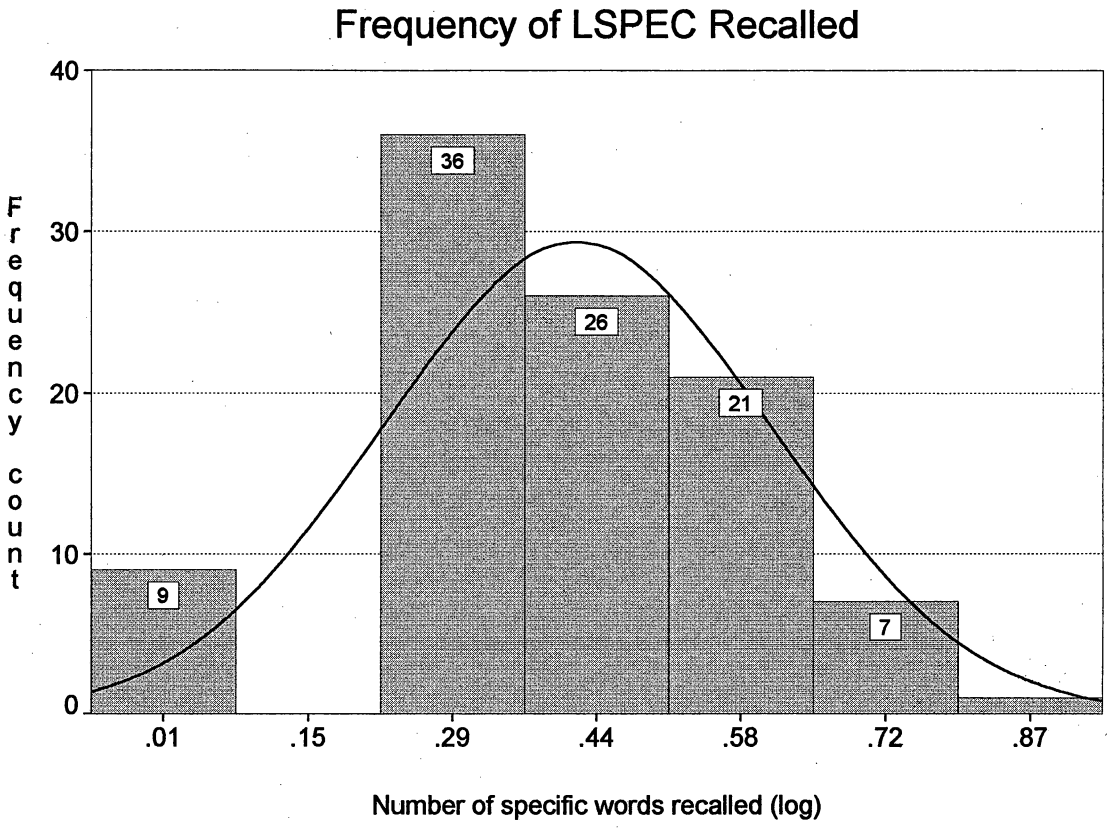

Frequency of LSPEC Recalled
Frequency count
40
30
20
10
0
36
26
21
9
7
.01
.15
.29
.44
.58
.72
.87
Number of specific words recalled (log)

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations for SPEC, GEN, and FEED by Activation (Moderate and High)

Group	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
Recall Specific Words by Activation (Log)			
Moderate	50	.4177	.1953
High	50	.4179	.1935
Total	100	.4178	.1934
Recall of General Points by Activation			
Moderate	50	2.9600	1.1421
High	50	2.9800	1.3923
Total	100	2.9700	1.2669
Perception of Fairness by Activation			
Moderate	50	2.5943	.8921
High	50	2.8171	.8984
Total	100	2.7057	.8977

difference found between the moderate and high activation groups in terms of the number of general negative points remembered, [t(df = 98) = .08, p = .938, eta = .0001].

Finally, a t-test was conducted for FEED by activation (moderate and high). A summary, provided in Table 5, displays the means and standard deviations of FEED by activation (moderate and high). There was not a significant difference found between the moderate and high activation groups in terms of perception of fairness [t(df= 98) = 1.24, p = .22, eta = .01].

Due to the possibility that the logarithmic transformation of the SPEC variable may have threatened the integrity of the data, a non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney U) was employed as a check for whether there was a significant difference between the mean rank of the moderate and high activation groups in terms of the number of specific words recalled. This test revealed no significant differences between the moderate activation group (mean rank = 45.94) and the high activation group (mean rank = 55.06) in terms of memory for specific words (U = 1022.0, p = .82).

Finally an additional test, chi-square, was conducted in order to determine whether recall for specific words increased proportionately with increases in activation level within the two activation groups (moderate and high). For both the high and moderate activation groups, the researcher obtained a frequency count of the number of times each of

the twelve specific words were recalled (See Table 6 and Table 7). Expected frequencies were then projected according to deviations in the activation levels (See Appendix C). The observed frequencies of recall for the twelve specific personality describing words were tested against the projected expected frequencies. The chi-square, for both the high and moderate activation groups, revealed that the observed frequencies significantly deviated from the expected frequencies (χ^2 (df=11) = 46.52, p=.000; χ^2 (df=11) = 520.32, p=.000, respectively). These results suggest that memory for the specific words varied significantly from the pattern that was expected based upon the activation levels of the words.

Table 6

Frequency Count for High Activation Stimulus Words

Stimulus Word (Activation level)	Frequency Count
Cruel (6.61)	19
Agitate (6.13)	10
Antagonistic (5.32)	19
Complaining (5.19)	4
Resentful (5.12)	3
Irritable (5.11)	7
Enemy (5.08)	16
Reject (5.05)	0
Oppressed (4.93)	3
Stubborn (4.89)	11
Disappoint (4.80)	3
Possessive (4.69)	3

Table 7

Frequency Count for Moderate Activation Stimulus Words

Stimulus Word (Activation level)	Frequency Count
Spiteful (4.51)	12
Grouchy (4.44)	20
Unfriendly (4.35)	10
Merciless (4.32)	10
Disapproving (4.28)	2
Scorn (4.06)	6
Annoy (3.99)	6
Jealous (3.73)	9
Willful (3.65)	8
Rival (3.51)	3
Repressed (3.37)	1
Dishearten (3.33)	2

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

In this study the activation component of emotion did not significantly influence the recall or the perception of fairness of a negative performance appraisal. There are at least four possible reasons for these results. First, the manipulation may have lacked mundane reality. Subjects may have been unable to imagine that the performance appraisal that they had received was personally related. If subjects could not effectively put themselves into this role, there would not be an emotional reaction to the performance appraisal and the activation component would not have an effect on memory or perception of fairness.

Conversely, it is also possible that the study closely reflected the real world. In past research, an activation effect was found in studies that used lists of unrelated words (Contini & Whissell, 1992; Paul & Whissell, 1992; Whissell, Marshall, & Whissell, 1990). In the current study, the researcher had attempted to create a situation that closely resembled a real world event (the performance appraisal process). Perhaps the activation component of affect is a lab produced phenomenon that disappears in the real world.

A third possible reason that this study did not produce

the hypothesized results is the type of stimulus that was employed. Again, most memory researchers used lists of unrelated words to test the effect of activation on recall; by contrast, the present study's activation stimulus was scattered within a performance appraisal and was used to produce a description of the subject. The size of the text may have overwhelmed subjects and interfered with the amount of specific words or general points remembered.

Interestingly, one general comment was made by a majority of subjects in both groups. They stated that they were, in fact, not team players. In the construction of the appraisal, the researcher focussed on a lack of teamwork when selecting the negative general points of the appraisal. Apparently, subjects had recognized the key area that needed improving (lack of teamwork); however, could not remember specific negative behaviors that were inhibiting their achievement of this goal. One could speculate that the concept of not being a team player was heavily encoded in memory and associative links between the propositions (general points) may have then become linked to this cue. In addition, there may have been associative links established between the general points and the specific personality describing words (the smallest unit into which the text could have been broken). Finally, the evaluative and activation component of the words (highly or moderately negative) may have been laterally linked to the teamwork

contextual cue.

According to Anderson (1990), as additional associative links are made between a primary concept and specific pieces of information, recall for any example of the contextual cue decreases. In the current study, there were twelve specific words and nine general points linked to the concept of teamwork. The large number of associative links may have limited the number of specific words or general points recalled; thus, providing little room for activation to have an effect.

Finally, subject's elaborations may have interfered with an activation effect on recall and perception of fairness of a performance appraisal. During reading, people will often generate new thoughts which will then be committed to memory along with the studied propositions (Anderson, 1990). Many times these thoughts (elaborations) will improve memory for the original propositions by providing redundant or alternative routes to the target propositions (Anderson, 1990). However, in this case, subject's additional thoughts may have weakened or interfered with the target propositions. To understand how this may have occurred, one has to look at cultural theories associated with teamwork.

The values and beliefs of a particular cultural group will affect the manner in which situations and experiences will be processed and interpreted (Ross & Nisbett, 1991).

Individualistic cultures (North America and Western Europe) tend to emphasize personal goals. The individual's relationship to the outside social world is based on personal interest and individual achievement. From a young age, children are socialized to be competitive and independent (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). This individualistic orientation is mirrored in work situations. Many companies conduct their performance appraisals on one particular individual's work behaviors as opposed to conducting a group-oriented performance appraisal. It is no wonder that employees strive for personal opportunity and self-interest as opposed to the group's goals or well-being.

With regard to this study's performance appraisal, a discrepancy may have occurred between the primary conceptual cue of lack of teamwork and the negative emotional tag that was supposed to be encoded in memory. During the reading of the performance appraisal, the conceptual cue may have been linked to a positive emotional tag due to a cultural emphasis on individualism. At the time of recall, subjects were required to produce negative work behaviors; however, the associative links between the lack of team work and the specific negative behaviors may have been blocked by a link established between a positive emotional tag and teamwork. Therefore, one would not find significant differences between the activation component of the two negative performance appraisals because of an interference effect

produced by a subject-generated positive emotional tag.

If this theory is accepted for explaining the memory results, there would be implications for the results that were obtained in the feedback segment of the experiment. As stated earlier, people tend to discredit negative feedback in order to avoid changing their self-esteem in a negative direction (Shavit & Shouval, 1980). If one accepts this self-esteem formulation, it would be expected that subjects would have rejected the performance appraisal and perceived it as unfair. However, the results revealed an opposite effect. Seventy-six percent of subjects averaged a collapsed score of 2.85 or less on the feedback scale. If one recalls, a collapsed score of two on the seven item fairness scale represented a positive perception of fairness and a score of three represented a neutral perception of fairness. Therefore, the majority of subjects from both activation groups did not perceive the performance appraisal as being unfair.

The cognitive-consistency theory may be useful in explaining the above results. As stated earlier, this formulation proposes that people tend to perceive and interpret information that maintains a stable self-percept. Subjects may have perceived the lack of teamwork as being positive, due to Western culture's value on individualistic achievement. Therefore, the intended association between lack of teamwork and a negative emotional response may not

have occurred. This may explain why there were no significant differences found between the two activation groups on perception of fairness. The activation effect tied to a negative emotional response may have been lost during a generation of positive associations related to the contextual cue (lack of teamwork).

Summary and Implications

The activation level of the specific words or general points of a negative performance appraisal did not affect recall or perception of fairness. It appeared that several factors could have blocked this effect. First, the experimenter may have been unable to create a scenario in which subjects could really imagine that this was their performance appraisal. This particular manipulation may only be effective in actual work settings. Second, the experiment may have closely resembled the real world, where activation does not have an effect.

Third, the sheer size of the text may have interfered with recall of any specific word or general point. If this factor blocked the activation effect on the recall of specific words or general points of a negative performance appraisal, one could assume that future researchers would have to limit the amount of information contained in a stimulus performance appraisal in order to prevent interference effects. However in reality, performance appraisals contain a large amount of information. To reduce

the amount of information in this study's performance appraisal would have created artificial experimental stimuli. The results of the study would then not generalize to the real world.

Fourth, subjects may have elaborated on the text during the processing of the appraisal; thus creating a positive evaluative node associated to a lack of teamwork in memory. This node may have interfered with recall and the intended negative perception of fairness associated to the performance appraisal. If these processes indeed had occurred, future studies may have to construct stimulus materials that focus on issues other than lack of teamwork. Perhaps, an examination of objective work behaviors that Western society deems as negative may produce an activation effect on the memory and perception fairness of a negative performance.

Finally, this study only examined the effect of activation on recall and perception of fairness on a negative performance appraisal. Future studies may include a positive feedback condition in order to assess potential evaluation by activation interactions. By adding a positive evaluative condition, a clearer picture may be obtained concerning the effect of activation on recall and perception of fairness of a performance appraisal.

In conclusion, one has to wonder whether the amount of information contained in performance appraisals may have to

be limited. Perhaps, companies may have to consider giving performance appraisals more often while limiting the amount of information contained in these reviews. In addition, companies that value cooperative team-based work units may have to re-examine whether their employees value teamwork or are oriented towards an individualistic approach. Seminars and workshops could be introduced to foster employees' recognition and value of a team approach.

APPENDIX A

Moderate Activation Performance Appraisal

Instructions:
Imagine that you have been working for a manufacturing company for a year. So far you have enjoyed your job and are looking forward to future employment with this company. There appears to be ample opportunity for advancement for individuals who are willing to work hard. You believe that you have completed all work projects in a timely manner and are a dedicated employee. This is the first performance appraisal you have received at your place of employment.

Please read the following performance appraisal carefully, paying particular attention to the words that describe your personality characteristics and to the words that describe the impact of your behavior on others.

Please read your evaluation with an open and objective mind. For it is the willingness to learn from the past that will ultimately lead our company and its employees to set an unsurpassed industry standard.

As you may be aware, each and everyone of us could improve in one or more areas. I have taken the time to outline areas of weaknesses that if resolved, will enhance your already well-developed assets.

The following is a synopsis of what I have observed:

I have been impressed with your ability to complete your work in a timely manner; however, your eagerness to complete projects often annoy and dishearten your fellow employees. Your co-workers perceive you being both grouchy and merciless when your focus is solely on completing a project. Perhaps, relating to your co-workers on a more personal level will change their perception of you as a rival.

Our company strongly recommends teamwork among co-workers. For the past year, you have made a large contribution to the development of our new prototype. However, your occasional unfriendly comments to your co-workers have repressed their contributions to the project.

Perhaps a few kind words and a little encouragement of their efforts could rectify this situation. Your co-workers would

thrive on some positive affirmations from a person in your professional standing. Attempt to be less willful. You tend to scorn other's input, which will only hinder the progress of the company. Many of your co-workers believe that you are spiteful and attempt to elicit all the glory.

Less disapproving and an effort to be less jealous of high profile cases will open the door to an effective dialogue with your co-workers. Dialogue that will ultimately lead to a more harmonious and lucrative future for yourself.

In closing, I would like to stress that greater rewards can be achieved through your participation in team work. I am confident that you will be able to refine your interpersonal skills to meet this expectation.

High Activation Performance Appraisal

Instructions:

Imagine that you have been working for a manufacturing company for a year. So far you have enjoyed your job and are looking forward to future employment with this company. There appears to be ample opportunity for advancement for individuals who are willing to work hard. You believe that you have completed all work projects in a timely manner and are a dedicated employee. This is the first performance appraisal you have received at your place of employment.

Please read the following performance appraisal carefully, paying particular attention to the words that describe your personality characteristics and to the words that describe the impact of your behavior on others.

Please read your evaluation with an open and objective mind. For it is the willingness to learn from the past that will ultimately lead our company and its employees to set an unsurpassed industry standard.

As you may be aware, each and everyone of us could improve in one or more areas. I have taken the time to outline areas of weaknesses that if resolved, will enhance your already well-developed assets.

The following is a synopsis of what I have observed:

I have been impressed with your ability to complete your work in a timely manner; however, your eagerness to complete projects often agitate and disappoint your fellow employees. Your co-workers perceive you being both irritable and cruel when your focus is solely on completing a project. Perhaps, relating to your co-workers on a more personal level will change their perception of you as a enemy.

Our company strongly recommends teamwork among co-workers. For the past year, you have made a large contribution to the development of our new prototype. However, your occasional antagonistic comments to your co-workers have oppressed their contributions to the project.

Perhaps a few kind words and a little encouragement of their efforts could rectify this situation. Your co-workers would thrive on some positive affirmations from a person in your professional standing. Attempt to be less stubborn. You tend to reject other's input, which will only hinder the progress of the company. Many of your co-workers believe that you are resentful and attempt to elicit all the glory.

Less complaining and an effort to be less possessive of high profile cases will open the door to an effective dialogue with your co-workers. Dialogue that will ultimately lead to a more harmonious and lucrative future for yourself.

In closing, I would like to stress that greater rewards can be achieved through your participation in team work. I am confident that you will be able to refine your interpersonal skills to meet this expectation.

APPENDIX B

Procedural Fairness Questionnaire

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the following seven questions by marking the answer that best represents your opinion. Please remember that to imagine that you had received this particular performance appraisal at your place of employment. Be as objective and honest as possible.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. The performance appraisal was honest and ethical in dealing with you?	1	2	3	4	5
2. The performance appraisal used consistent standards in evaluating your performance?	1	2	3	4	5
3. The performance appraisal gave you feedback that helped you learn how you were doing?	1	2	3	4	5
4. The performance appraisal was completely candid and frank?	1	2	3	4	5
5. The performance appraisal showed a real interest in trying to be fair?	1	2	3	4	5
6. The performance appraisal made clear what was expected of you?	1	2	3	4	5
7. The performance appraisal obtained accurate information about your performance?	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C

Data for Projection of Expected Frequencies

High Activation

Activation	Z-Score Activation	Actual Frequency	Z-Score Frequency	Expected Frequency
6.61	2.535847	19	1.678853	24.53003
6.13	1.645208	10	0.284113	18.7829
5.32	0.142255	19	1.678853	9.084615
5.19	-0.09896	4	-0.64571	7.5281
5.12	-0.022884	3	-0.80068	6.689977
5.11	-0.2474	7	-0.1808	6.570245
5.08	-0.30306	16	1.213939	6.211049
5.05	-0.35874	0	-1.2656	5.851854
4.93	-0.58139	3	-0.80068	4.415071
4.89	-0.65561	11	0.439084	3.936143
4.8	-0.8226	3	-0.80068	2.858556
4.69	-1.02671	3	-0.80068	1.541505
Mean		Mean		
5.24333		8.166667		
S.D.		S.D.		
0.538939		6.45282		

Low Activation

4.51	1.335027	12	0.889065	14.29904
4.44	1.164598	20	2.440887	13.42044
4.35	0.945475	10	0.501109	12.29081
4.32	0.872434	10	0.501109	11.91426
4.28	0.775046	2	-1.05051	11.41221
4.06	0.239411	6	-0.2748	8.650888
3.99	0.068982	6	-0.2748	7.772287
3.73	-0.56404	9	0.307131	4.508912
3.65	-0.75882	8	0.113154	3.504796
3.51	-1.09967	3	-0.85674	1.747594
3.37	-1.44053	1	-1.24469	-0.00961
3.33	-1.53792	2	-1.05071	-0.51167
Mean		Mean		
3.961667		7.416667		
S.D.		S.D.		
6.45282		5.155229		

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